Both the Government and the judiciary are concerned with the plight of undertrials in Jails. The governments of Punjab and Haryana have been requested to take necessary action in this regard.

(c) The Government has endeavoured constantly to bring about improvements in the functioning of courts and simplify procedures for ensuring speedy justice. The measures taken by the Govt. include setting up of Fast Track Courts, periodical revision of Judge strength, grants-in-aid to the States for improvement in judicial infrastructure and for the use of information technology in courts, etc.

The problem of delays in judicial process is also being examined, *inter alia*, the Justice Malimath committee set up to suggest reforms in the criminal justice system.

Exorbitant charging by private blood banks

†*206. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that private blood banks in the country are charging exorbitant price from patients;

(b) if so, whether Government are considering to take any action to keep a check on such blood banks and prevent them from doing so; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and by when, and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI SHATRUGHAN SINHA): (a) to (c) Selling of Whole Human Blood is prohibited and, therefore, no blood bank can charge any price for blood itself. However, before the blood is issued by the blood banks for transfusion, it is mandatory under the provisions of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules to test each unit of blood collected for freedom from HIV 1 & 2 antibodies, Hepatitis B Surface antigen, Hepatitis C antibody, Malaria and Syphills. Some expenditure is incurred by the blood banks for conducting these mandatory test for transfusion transmitted diseases and for handling of blood. This expenditure has been estimated to be about Rs. 500/- and is recovered from the patients as service charges by the blood banks.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

2. Guideline have been issued by National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) for recovery of service charges by blood banks in different sector. As per these guidlines, government and voluntary blood banks may charge Rs. 250/- per unit of blood as service charge for issuing blood to patients of their own hospitals or to other government or voluntary sector hospitals and subsidies rest of the cost. These blood banks while issueing blood to private nursing homes/hospitals may realise full processing cost of Rs. 500/-. The blood banks run in private sector may recover cost towards service charges to a maximum of Rs. 500/- per unit. The guidelines also permit cost recovery for additional tests (other than mandatory) done on the blood unit.

3. It has been reported that by and large there is not much variation from NACO guidelines in the service charges being recovered by blood banks in the private sector in the country. However, it is noticed that some stand alone blood banks and blood banks attached to corporate or private sector recover service charges which are much higher than the one circulated by the government on the grounds of carrying out test in addition to the mandatory tests and using consumables of higher price.

4. Since different blood banks have varying overhead costs in handling and testing of blood, and since there is no legal provision to fix uniform blood processing charges, the blood banks are not being penalised for charging variable rates. However, the state bodies such as State AIDS Control Societies and State Blood Tranfusion councils are seized of this issue and from time to time during meeting with private blood banks, have been insisting and urging upon them to follow NACO guidelines on recovery of service charges.

Foreign investment in print media

†*207. SHRI RAJIV RANJAN SINGH 'LALAN':
SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had obtained the opinion of experts in print media before granting permission to foreign capital investment in print media;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.